

Minutes of the Meeting
Camden Opera House Committee
Monday, November 15, 2010; Tucker Room

In attendance: Don White, Kerry Hadley, Raymond Brunyanski, Bob Williams, Jon Orlando, Dave Morrison, Kate Bates, Susan Dorr, Stephanie Woodman, guest speaker, Matt Eddy. Briefly, for photo: Schlnot Auciello, Village Soup. Absent: Deb Dodge, Selectboard liaison; Hal Owen

Meeting called to order by Don White at 5:05. October meeting Minutes were approved as amended.

New committee members Kate Bates and Bob Williams were officially welcomed. Kate's town interest form expressed her desire to encourage economic development of the village and pursue grant writing to support Opera House efforts. Bob is retired and interested in becoming more involved in the cultural events of the town. They will serve as alternates but will have voting privileges when we lack a quorum.

Chair's report: Don shared some reflections on the history of the town drawn from the 2004 book Camden Chronology by Anne Morris and how far we have come since 1876 when the original Opera House was built then destroyed in 1892 in the great fire and rebuilt a few years later. Fast forward to the present day with wi-fi, world premiere's of TV shows, hosting conferences that draw national and international attention.

Matt Eddy: Economic Development consultant from Eaton Peabody shared some of the results from the recent town-wide discussions of the economic development goals and potential for Camden downtown. As the discussion goes forward, what should be on the list for the action plan? The Opera House is a key economic engine in Camden. It is the hub of the 'Campu Concept' bringing high quality live productions to town, and should be a focus of the creative economy. Among other town assests: our school system the natural environment, we have a rich array of offerings to attract new residents and businesses to Camden. The goal is to make Camden 'younger' and events are a significant piece - they bring in lots of people, boost the hospitality sector and keep the town lively in the off season.

(We took a short break to have our group photo taken by the photographer for Village Soup)

The Opera House itself is part of the 'bone structure' of the town and it's appeal as a tourist attraction can be expanded upon. The issues around expanding the role of the COH in the town are limited space - discussion underway about the possibility of moving the town offices up to the Knox Mill building where there is 10,000 SF of office space, and giving the rest of the OH space over to events and OH programming. Cash flow is critical for the upkeep of the building over time. There is significant competition from other venues in the area. We have some challenges in order to keep pace with technology and capacity. For performances we have some infrastructure issues, ie. should we consider a loading dock in order to attract bigger national acts and how would we raise the money for that development? And as importantly, how do we grow the management capacity to keep pace with a

full time professional operation? Without full time staffing we are limited. We are part of the emergence of a regional character, the chambers of commerce are cooperating, the work of the Gateway project is advancing. It is possible to strengthen the capacity of communities rather than competing.

The Creative Economy - the 100K SF of space at the Knox Mill could be instrumental in the progress of attracting young people. Charles Colgan, former ME state economist focuses on what work forces we should attract. It is all about attracting and accommodating visitors. We could apply for a ME Tech Institute Cluster Grant to figure out what tech sectors to pursue. Pine Tree zone advantages are available. Preferably the town will attract a number of small employers rather than one big one since we have seen the result when the one big employer pulls out.

How do we get the public involved? How do these thoughts move to an action plan? It won't happen in a vacuum - outreach is critical to draw in businesses and jobs. CEDAC has approached the Knowledge Transfer Alliance at UMO to have them analyze what we need to do. Kate pointed out the potential for Camden to truly be a 'Conference Town'. Matt Eddy mentioned that Christopher Gates of the Philanthropy Foundation has recently moved to Maine and will be working from here - he is fascinated by this community.

Next CEDAC meeting is Thursday, Nov. 19 at the Congo Church. The economic development director will work on getting money attached to the proposed projects. The conventional wisdom is that it takes 20 years for a community to undergo the kind of change we are talking about and Camden is about 1/2 way into the process.

Kerry reported that we will be hosting a Business After Hours for the Rockland Chamber since the Camden Chamber is booked through 2011. The date is Wednesday, March 9. The scope can be as large or as simple as we desire - one thought is to have film/video showing on a rotating schedule in the auditorium to highlight our new technical capabilities; the COH and cosponsors provide door prizes (tix to an upcoming event), refreshments will be served. Raymond offered to have Natalie's Restaurant provide some hors d'oeuvres. OH committee members are encouraged to attend to greet guests and conduct tours, to be ambassadors for the OH. Kerry seeks committee members who would join her in actively producing this event.

Susan Dorr talked about plans that are coming together for an historic film/talk event in conjunction with the NE Historic Film Archive with 3 or 4 short features and some local historians to speak. The film archive representative is beginning to look through their catalogue to find some footage that might be of interest. Cost is based on the transfer of the footage from film to digital. We talked about pursuing some grants to support future film festivals, ME Arts Commission, the K2 Foundation. Ben Fowlie is also still interested in something like a CIFF rewind/replay but she and Ben have not met formally on this yet.

Kerry reported on Wi-Fi in the building and the ongoing discussion about whether it should be free or if it should be password protected and at a cost to users. We're looking for policy recommendations.

Meeting adjourned at 6:33 PM

Respectfully submitted, Susan Dorr

